

Part VIII

1975-1990

All attention turned to Main Library in July 1975 when construction of the county's \$4.2 million Law Enforcement Center and jail caused damage to the 1956 addition to the library. As crews began pounding steel sheeting into the ground in preparation for excavation, cracks began appearing in the library. City workers helped ease the situation by placing duct tape over the cracks.



Library damage 1975

Two months later, vibrations from pile-driving accelerated the cracking, and construction halted while engineers assessed the problem. Steel supports were installed. Except for one week, the library remained open; staff shifted all books and office furniture from the rear to the front of the building.

Library Condition Makes Headlines

To the Editor:

What is happening to the county jail and to the Wilmington Public Library is almost beyond the bounds of irony.

For the jail to undermine the library is a study in priorities.

If we spent more money on the Wilmington Public Library, I doubt very much if we should have to spend so much on the jail. After all, education is the final solution to this troubled world.

The County Commission and the City Council should certainly reassess their priorities on spending.

The library should be close to the top of the list; the jail should be close to the bottom.

Public protest

to move into temporary quarters at the old Acme Building on the northeast corner of Front and Chestnut streets. Book circulation plummeted to half its usual numbers.

The library controversy changed the political milieu of New Hanover County. The city and county began in earnest to talk about consolidation beginning with services such as the library.

Friends Forever

An enduring legacy of the deplorable inadequacy of the library building was the formation of the New Hanover Friends of the Public Library. The Junior League



Acme Building

was instrumental in the organization of an advocate group for better library services. Reminiscent of the Sorosis Club, a women's organization that pushed for a public library in 1906, the Junior League reached out to all segments of the community for help.

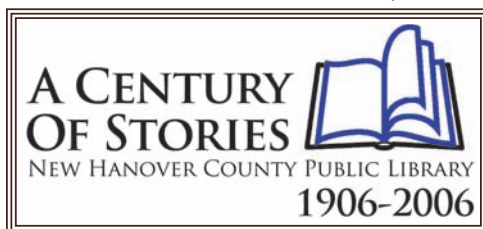
The library Friends held their first meeting on June 30, 1976. Martha T. Daughtry, Gorda Singletary and Harriet Somberg were responsible for organizing the meeting. Ann Wilkerson served as the first president.

Armed with a statistical summary of needs and community support, the Friends endeavored to place the library under county government control and lobbied for funding for a new building.

Many of the organizing Friends became active members of the Library Advisory Board and are credited with subsequent good library service in New Hanover County.

Library Advisory Board

The first meeting of the New Hanover County Public Library Advisory Board was held on



September 22, 1977. Dr. James D. Hundley was elected chair. Their goals were ambitious: secure funding from the county for a new building; hire a library



Dr. James D. Hundley

design consultant and architect; advocate the relocation of the Red Cross Branch Library to the suburbs; and bring the Carolina Beach Library into the county system.

Where to Build?

After New Hanover County set aside \$2.6 million for a new library, the Advisory Board and County Commissioners tackled one of the most controversial tasks: where to put the new facility. One faction lobbied for a brand new building in a central county location accessible to the majority of county residents. The other faction wanted the library to remain downtown, where the majority of countywide employees still worked.

The matter was settled when the former Belk-Beery department store, located at 201 Chestnut Street, was made available for purchase for \$500,000; the city promised to provide \$300,000 if the library remained downtown. Hoyt Galvin of Charlotte was hired as library design consultant and John Jefferies as architect.

Grand Re-Opening

The 3-story building, with \$3 million worth of renovations, had been transformed into a modern library with plenty of space to grow when it opened on March 9, 1981. During their first meeting in the new library, the Board set a goal of increasing the book budget \$100,000 to meet state standards. The collection, while